
A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

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ART. I. — ON THE COURSE OF PROTESTANT THEOLOGY IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

I.

IN the sixteenth century the chief religious forces which have since animated the world burst into action with a primal energy. It was a century during which, in a singular degree, the chief motive powers of Europe were simultaneously at work; in which German originality, and Swiss independence, and French organization, and English comprehensiveness, were all brought into action on the same supreme subject; the controversies being diffused, and the conflicts at the same time concentrated, by the use of a single learned language; so that all the various national and personal influences, which it now, notwithstanding all our means of communication, takes years to bring face to face with one another, were in immediate contact. The presence of foreign professors, like Erasmus and Peter Martyr, at our own Universities, is but a striking illustration of the manner in which all the elements of life and thought were brought together in one long struggle at that time; only, alas! to be too much separated again, by the action of the Reformation itself in developing national churches and national impulses, and thus breaking the bonds, both of language and religion, by which Europe had become so closely united. An attempt to sketch, even in outline, this vast scene of theological convulsion would be involved in inextricable difficulties, amidst which all practical interest would too probably be lost. It is proposed, therefore, in these papers, to endeavour to illustrate, by means of the leading controversies, some of the great principles which were at work, and thus to point out, perhaps, the cardinal truths and realities which, though often unconsciously, are the real centres

of our struggles at the present day. A writer of distinction spoke not long ago of "the arid theology" of the sixteenth century. The expression recalls a criticism of the historian Hallam on "Romeo and Juliet," which he describes as full of "frigid conceits." They are conceits, no doubt; but the man must be singularly constituted who regards them as frigid. In the same way the sixteenth century is full of theologies; but a man must have a strange view of human nature and human history who can call them arid. At all events, they split Europe into two great camps, which have been more or less at war ever since; they evoked new and momentous forces in the Roman camp as well as in the Protestant; they opened the springs of new religious ideals, new literatures, new devotions—in a word, new worlds. It is not from arid sands that such fruits spring. Let us endeavour to appreciate in some measure the influences which gave birth to such results.

Consider, in the first place, as a matter of fact, the impulse from which the whole movement started. If we look at it from the point of view of a statesman, it is obvious that the first great public act in the momentous history is the Diet of Worms of 1521. From that moment the authority, not only of the Pope, but of the Emperor, was challenged, and was successfully held in check in one at least of the great States of the Empire, not merely by a religious reformer, but by the powerful and authoritative Prince who was at the head of that State. From that moment the Empire, and the Church within the Empire, was no longer at one, and the long series of public acts commenced by which the Protestant world was called into existence and consolidated. Upon that followed in the next ten years the memorable Diets of Augsburg and Spiers, and upon them the various leagues, treaties, wars, councils, and synods in which the principles and results of the Reformation were developed and settled. But the Diet of Worms centres around Luther, and it is in the action taken with respect to him, by the Pope and the Emperor on the one side and the Elector of Saxony on the other, that its vital importance consists. This, however, is but the political aspect of the fact that the motive ideas of the Reformation arose out of Luther's teaching and experience. No other influence had really threatened either the Pope's authority or Roman doctrine. The new learning of humanism, even in the keen and satirical hands of Erasmus, had not been able to effect any practicable breach in the great fortifications of antiquity, wealth, and power within which the existing ecclesiastical system was entrenched. That system had a profound hereditary hold on the minds and the spiritual apprehensions of men. They might distrust it or dislike it;

but, in Butler's phrase, they were not so certain that there was nothing in it; and when any dispute with it came to the final issue, they were not prepared to defy it, with all the possible consequences. But Luther succeeded in convincing a number of strong men that it might be defied; he defied it himself, and he laid down the principles on which his supporters might stand in maintaining a similar defiance. We have to look, therefore, to the cardinal principles of Luther's teaching if we are to understand the germ from which the Reformation sprang. In a still higher degree we must look to that teaching if we are to appreciate the main currents of the reformed theology. There were other theological influences, of course, side by side with his; but until his death, in 1546, his voice was certainly the most potent in the theological controversies of his day; and even after his death his teaching became, in great measure, the touchstone by which a large part of the reformed theology was tested.

What, then, were the great principles with which Luther gave this new influence to the world? It is a received maxim on this subject that the Reformation rests on two principles—a formal and a material one; the formal one being the supreme authority of the Scriptures, and the material one being the doctrine of justification by faith. That maxim is true enough as far as it goes, but it does not take us to the root of the matter. As to the formal principle, that of the supreme authority of the Scriptures, not only had it been asserted by men like Wycliffe and Hus, but we find St. Thomas Aquinas, under the first question of his "Summa," in Article VIII., laying down that the authority of the Scriptures in any discussion carries with it the weight of necessary argument, whereas the authority of the doctors of the Church has merely the force of subsidiary and probable argument; and he quotes the saying of St. Augustine which played so large a part in subsequent Protestant discussion: "Solis eis Scripturarum libris, qui canonici appellantur, didici hunc timorem honoremque deferre, ut nullum auctorem eorum in scribendo errasse aliquid firmissime credam . . . alios autem ita lego, ut quantalibet sanctitate doctrinaque præpolleant, non ideo verum putem quod ipsi senserunt, vel scripserunt." Perhaps, indeed, it was not until the Council of Trent that this principle was formally disregarded by the Church of Rome. It was a principle which came to the front in the course of controversy, but it did not constitute the vital germ of Reformation life and thought. That is to be seen in the other principle, justly called the material one, of justification by faith, which accordingly became of necessity the watchword of the controversy.

But it is requisite to look even beyond this principle, to its first apprehension in Luther's experience, if we are duly to appreciate its import. What had brought this principle into such prominence and intensity in Luther's consciousness? It was not any theological controversy, not the pressure of any scholastic argument, not the dispute about indulgences, nor any other public occasion whatever; it was simply his personal spiritual experience in realizing the relation of his soul to God. The craving of his soul, to which every other was secondary, was for peace with God, and for the love of God. To obtain this peace he had entered a monastery, and submitted himself for years, with the utmost strictness, to its hard discipline; but he failed to assure himself of peace with God. He remained sensible of his sin, of the deep imperfection attaching to all his efforts, even the best; and he felt himself unworthy of God's favour and love. The main point was that it was not enough for him that his faults and sins should be forgiven, in the sense of due satisfaction being made for them, either here or hereafter, in this life or in purgatory. For the penalties of sin he cared comparatively little; the great trouble was that sin stood between himself and God, and prevented his living in the assured sense of God's favour. The forgiveness he cared for was not a material but a personal forgiveness. As he himself put it, in one of his paradoxical sayings: A man forgiven by God would feel himself in heaven although in hell, and a man not forgiven by God would feel himself in hell although in heaven. The personal relation of mutual love and trust between himself and God was what he cared for, and what he was striving for, and this seemed to him to be rendered impracticable by his inveterate sin and corruption.

It is the idea of this personal relation which it is essential to grasp with full distinctness and intensity if the cardinal doctrine of the Reformation is to be realized. It is quite possible to work out a whole system of theology without apprehending this personal relation, or taking any practical account of it. God may be regarded as the Supreme Judge, the Father of our spirits, but at an unapproachable distance; and the soul's relation to Him may be mainly regarded as that of a subject to a sovereign, or, if that of a child to a father, yet of a child held at too great a distance to have intimate personal relations with its parent. So far as this is the case, the sense of sin and guilt becomes the sense of having incurred an incapacity or a penalty, and the urgent question is in what way each particular sin or failure can be atoned for, or have amends made for it. The sense of intimate

personal relationship may be hardly realized as possible, and the absence of it, consequently, may not be a perpetual grief. This is really the key to the whole of that Roman and ecclesiastical system of penance, confession, and satisfaction, against which the Reformation waged such war. It was a system for making amends and procuring pardon for particular sins; and from that point of view it had a certain reasonableness, or could at least be presented in a fairly reasonable form. But to the great mass of men and women who submitted to it, the question of their personal relation to God no more arose in their minds than the question of their personal relation to the Emperor in the case of their violating some imperial ordinance. The Emperor personally was nothing to them, nor they to him, except so far as they came into conflict with his authority in respect to the particular ordinance in question; and all that he expected of them was that they should bear the punishment, or make the amends, which the law or the ordinance required. Even the recognised and important distinction between *culpa* and *pœna*, guilt and punishment, did not necessarily touch the central point of the matter. *Culpa*, or guilt, might be regarded as simply a standing liability to *pœna*, or punishment, until the requisite amends were made. It need not involve, and under the prevalent feeling now under consideration it did not involve, that sense of personal disfavour, of the loss of peace and communion with a beloved person, which is the craving from which the reformed principle takes its rise. A similar point may be considered in reference to the word *forgiveness*, which has practically two meanings, or a double meaning. It may mean the remission of a penalty, the passing over of an offence, with scarcely any reference to personal relations between the person who forgives and the person who is forgiven. But it may also mean the restoration of personal relations, with scarcely any reference to the remission or removal of the material consequences of the offence. In family relations there may be offences of which the consequences are irreparable, and for which the offender must permanently suffer, but which may, nevertheless, be perfectly forgiven, in the sense of entire love, confidence, and favour being reestablished between the offending and the offended relatives.

Now, this is the distinction which was brought out with a new vividness by Luther's consciousness and Luther's experience, and which gave rise to the revived apprehension of St. Paul's doctrine of justification. He wanted to know whether he could be assured of his personal acceptance with God; whether he could be taken again to his Father's heart, and live in the light of his Father's countenance. That, he

was sure, he could not know, he could not claim, upon the ground of his own condition, or upon the basis of any obedience of his own. Justification meant being forgiven in the personal sense of the word—taken into favour, given the position of a good child in the heavenly Father's household, or, in technical language, accounted righteous before God. It did not mean, and does not mean, forgiveness in the mere material sense of being relieved from all the penalties of sin. Many of those penalties may be permanent in this world, and may have their effect on our position in the final judgment; but they need not interfere with the blessed personal relations towards God of filial confidence, trust, love, and perfect peace.

Now, justification, conceived in this sense, can only be an act of personal grace, and it may be, and in human relations it often must be, granted from motives which are quite independent of the merits or acts of the person to whom it is offered. It may be offered to a son for the sake of his mother, to a husband or wife for the sake of a child, to another for the sake of a friend; but whatever the cause for which it is offered, there is one thing indispensable to its enjoyment, which is at the same time the only means by which it can be enjoyed. It must be believed and accepted. Not to believe or accept a forgiveness thus offered is, indeed, a renewed offence of the highest kind; it is a refusal of love, an act of ingratitude, which must cause a greater personal separation than ever. But, on the other hand, if it is accepted, it must be accepted simply as an act of grace; and, though it involves the highest obligations for the future, yet to attempt, in accepting it, to plead any merits of one's own, past, present, or future, would be felt among human beings to be evidence of a total want of appreciation of the grace with which the forgiveness is offered. Such is the gracious, natural, human analogy, by which the doctrine of justification for Christ's sake by faith only may be best illustrated. If a father may offer forgiveness to a son for his mother's sake, we may well conceive of God as offering us forgiveness for Christ's sake, for Christ's love, Christ's suffering, Christ's perfect obedience; and in this sense the righteousness of Christ may well be regarded as covering us, and being imputed to us, not in any fictitious sense, but as the offering for the sake of which God receives us again into His favour, and admits us to communion with Him, if we do but believe Him and accept His love, with all it involves and requires. It may, perhaps, be said, in passing, that there seems something more natural and reasonable than appears often to be realized in the old theological language respecting our Saviour's having fulfilled the law for us, not only by His death, but by His life, and having thus given satisfaction to

God's justice. It seems evident, at least, that if the human race had not presented one single instance of the fulfilment of the law of its nature, if every being in human form had failed to realize the Divine ideal, it would have been impossible for Divine satisfaction to have rested on such a race. Whereas, on the other hand, when that ideal had once been realized, an earnest had at least been afforded of the fulfilment of the Divine purpose, and God could once more say of the nature, at least, which He had created, that it was very good.

But we are not here concerned, as a matter of controversy, with the arguments on which the doctrine of justification by faith rests, except so far as is necessary to illustrate its meaning as the starting-point of the reformed theology. The considerations which have been adduced are of importance as illustrating the fact, that the cardinal principle of the Reformation was the revival in men of a sense of their personal relation to God, as the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega, of their religious life. But unless it could be proclaimed to them that that relation was one of peace and love, it would have been impracticable to revive such a sense. Unless men have the assurance that they are at peace with God, they inevitably shrink from Him. They hide themselves among the trees of the garden of the world whenever they hear His voice. They may set up, and may develop infinitely, ecclesiastical systems for acquittal and discharge from His judgments; but they will not dare to take His hand, as it were, and look up to Him face to face, and live in assured trust and love towards Him. Yet it is this latter feeling which is necessary to bring out the full strength of the human soul. It is only when a man can say, in the full sense of the words, "O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer," when he is assured that the eternal God is his refuge, and that underneath him are the everlasting arms, that the full truth, energy, and independence of his nature can be exerted. But this is the new life which was revived in Christendom by the exhibition of the truth of justification by faith. It was not merely proclaimed, it was exhibited in action. The denunciation of indulgences, and the long controversy which followed, had the effect of gradually familiarizing the minds of all thoughtful and earnest men with the grand truth, that they could all claim the forgiveness, the favour and the love of God, whenever they believed His promises for Christ's sake, and would accept them. An enormous cloud of apprehension was lifted off their minds, and they were able to look even the Papal system in the face, and to act on their own consciences, in defiance of all consequences, whether in this world or in the next.

This revived sense of peace with God became everything to them, and altered all the proportions of their religious and moral life. It explains the reason for much that might otherwise seem barren controversy respecting such questions as the relation of faith and good works. What was really at issue, in all the disputes which prevailed on that subject during the sixteenth century, was not so much the truth as the balance of truth. The history of religion exhibits a perpetual oscillation between the relative attractions of the first Commandment and the second. Our Lord said that the first of all the Commandments is: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." "This," He said, "is the first and great Commandment, and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." That first Commandment is so high an ideal that human nature is constantly inclined to do unconsciously what an eminent and beautiful writer—the author of "Ecce Homo"—actually printed, and to act as if our Lord had said: "The first of all the Commandments is, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."[1] It is possible, at all events, to pursue so earnestly a religion of good works towards our neighbour, as to put practically in the second place a religion of love towards God. That was in the Middle Ages, and is now, one of the dangers of the Roman system. Its orders of monks, with their lives of self-sacrifice for the good of others, may so dazzle the minds of men and women as to make them forget that the true law of human nature, as declared by our Lord, is not that we should love our neighbour more than ourselves, but that we should love God with the whole heart and soul, and our neighbour as ourselves. What was aimed at by the first principle of the reformers was to restore the true balance in this respect—to make trust in God, love of God, peace with God, the supreme object of men's lives.

In this effort their temptation, perhaps, was to overweight the balance in the other direction. As Archbishop Benson once said, if you make a ship roll too far on one side, it can hardly be saved from sinking without rolling back, in the first instance, too far on the other. But, at all events, this is the key to the whole reformed teaching on the subject of good works, and when duly applied, it guards effectually against any danger in that respect. "Love God," said the Reformers, "with all your heart and soul, and love to your neighbour will follow"; but it is too possible, if you forget the proportion which our Lord establishes between love to

[1] "Ecce Homo," fifth edition, p. 156: "To love one's neighbour as one's self was, Christ said, the first and greatest law."

God and love to your neighbour, that your very enthusiasm for good works, your very "enthusiasm of humanity," as it was called by the writer just mentioned, may be so exclusively developed, as to blind your eyes to the nature of your relation to God, and thus gradually to weaken all those higher qualities of the human soul which depend on your duly realizing that relation. These controversies, in short, were not controversies on points of abstract theology, but between two great conceptions and systems of life. The reformed ideal was that of the life of men justified by faith, living all alike, clergy or laity, men or women, in the faith and love, as well as the fear, of God, clinging to His peace and His communion as the supreme privilege of their lives, and serving their neighbour in their ordinary vocations as their duty might require. On the other side, taken as a whole, was a system of life in which men and women lived, indeed, in the fear of God, but without full assurance of peace with Him, never assured of their personal forgiveness, always apprehensive of the punishments, in this world and the next, due to their particular sins, and striving, by heroic and often admirable efforts of self-sacrifice for their neighbours, to make amends for their faults, and to win some remission of evil for themselves and others. The struggle, however disguised under various forms of controversy, is a struggle as to the preponderance of the first or the second Commandment. But the first Commandment can never retain the preponderance which is given to it by our Saviour except on the basis of the assurance of the free personal forgiveness of the soul for Christ's sake. Then, when it knows that that forgiveness is freely offered to its faith, it can give its whole heart to God without reserve, and then its duties to its neighbour appear in their natural form and proportion, and it devotes itself to them without exaggeration, in pursuance of the ordinary claims of life.

This consideration, it may be observed, will explain the keenness, and, alas! sometimes the bitterness, of some of the controversies respecting the nature of justification by faith which arose, in the course of the century, among the Reformers themselves, and which it will be sufficient, from this point of view, briefly to refer to, without pursuing them in detail. Such, in particular, was the remarkable controversy with Osiander. He, although firmly asserting the truth of our justification for Christ's sake, and not for any merits of our own, yet urged that it must be for the sake, not of what Christ had done for us, but for the sake of that which He produced in us, by the infusion of His own righteousness, that we were accounted righteous before God; in fact, he

practically revived that interpretation of justification which treats it as meaning to make righteous, instead of to account righteous. Our Saviour, he represented, had redeemed the world by His life and death, and had thus made our justification possible; but we can enjoy that justification only when, by union with Christ through faith, His Divine life becomes our righteousness. In technical language, this amounted to teaching justification by infused, instead of by imputed, righteousness, and it was at once opposed with the greatest earnestness by the leading Reformers, including Melanchthon. He urged at once that such a doctrine made our justification or forgiveness dependent, after all, on ourselves, on our own condition, and not on the sacrifice made for us by Christ. Osiander's teaching, he said, withdraws the honour due to the Mediator, obscures the grievous nature of the sin which remains even in those who are partakers of the righteousness of Christ, destroys the chief consolation of pious souls, and leads them into a state of perpetual doubtfulness. In fact, Osiander's theory struck at the very nerve of the reformed doctrine, because it deprived men of the right of claiming God's favour and peace with God for the sake of Christ alone, and consequently of entering into the enjoyment of that peace immediately and without reserve. A man must wait, according to any such theory, until he can satisfy himself that the righteousness of Christ is duly working in him, before he can look up to God in full confidence as His justified child. The danger and mischief of it was not that it was a technical theological error, but that it barred the way to that life in the light of God's countenance which, from the first moment of awakening in the soul, the Reformers desired it to realize. So, again, the contention of others, like Major, that good works were necessary to justification, was similarly resisted at the outset; not because there was the slightest question, in the minds of any but a few fanatics, that good works and righteousness are an essential part of a Christian life, but because it was essential, for the purpose of maintaining a free relation of trust in God, that His forgiveness should be recognised as offered to us of His own grace and favour, antecedently to anything that we have done or might do. In one instance after another, the Reformers of the first half of the sixteenth century checked with the utmost earnestness any tendency to misapprehend the nature of the forgiveness and justification, of the free admittance to God's favour, which they proclaimed, or to obscure our claim to it by putting forward any conditions for it but the merits of the Saviour Himself. What they were guarding against was not a mere erroneous doctrine respecting the terms of salvation, but the danger of weakening that sense of peace and free communion

with God, which was the very ground on which they stood and the air in which they breathed.

It will be considered in subsequent articles how this principle worked itself out, in the course of the century, upon other great theological questions, such as the Sacraments and predestination; but, as a conclusion to the present article, it may be pointed out that these considerations materially affect the practical character of that "formal principle" of the Reformation to which reference was made at the outset. "The Word of God" assumes a new character to men under the conscious belief of their immediate communion with Him, and of their living in the daily light of His countenance. It was one thing to uphold the Scriptures as the supreme authority, the ultimate law of the Church, and another thing to regard them as a daily lamp to the feet, and a light to the paths, of those who were under God's direct guidance and who looked up to Him for that guidance day by day. The astonishing feat by which, at the very commencement of the German movement, the New Testament, and soon afterwards the Old Testament, were placed, in the vernacular, at the command of the German people, had an immense effect in deepening and maintaining this feeling. Within a few years after the first note had been struck, every man and woman who understood Luther's German had the means of living under the daily influence of the Word of God, as contained in the Holy Scriptures. That expression, *the Word of God*, did not mean in Luther's mouth, nor in the mouths of the Reformers, merely the canon of Scripture. It was not the mere letter of the canon which they had in view as a fixed and, as it were, legal authority. But God Himself was recognised as speaking in those Scriptures; the words of our Lord in the New Testament, the words which He spake by holy men and prophets in the Old Testament, were felt to be His voice, bringing those who read them into direct communion with Him. The Scriptures thus established and maintained a relation between God and man by the same means as that by which such personal relations are maintained among ourselves—by mutual voices and assurances. There was thus a greater elasticity about the conception than has often prevailed in later times. But one thing was the centre of all the life and all the teaching of the Reformers —that God was speaking to them as their reconciled Father, and that they were in direct communion with Him; and in that faith they felt themselves independent of any human power, whether embodied in Church or State. It was this feeling, above all, which gave to human life that new impulse and energy which constituted the Reformation so momentous an epoch in human history.

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